# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire: Rejected Applicants, Democracy and Governance Annual Program Statement (APS)

## Conducted November 2010

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

Starting in 2005, USAID/Egypt's Democracy and Governance (DG) Office implemented the Annual Program Statement (APS). The APS provided grants to local NGOs supporting the DG Strategic Objective. To date, more than 1,000 concept papers have been submitted resulting in 97 grants worth a combined total of approximately $78.5 million.

Grantees are provided a workshop attended by the technical, procurement, and financial management offices in which guidance on developing concept papers and applications are presented in Arabic. An Arabic language guide prepared by the DG office is provided to prospective applicants as well. A comprehensive pre-award assessment is carried out for grantees. During these assessments, potential grantees are made aware of sound accounting and financial practices. Grantees are also offered an annual training providing information and knowledge on financial and procurement related regulations to assist them with managing their grants.

In an effort to better understand USAID/Egypt's attempt to work more effectively with local organizations, a questionnaire was sent to organizations whose applications were rejected under the APS. Out of the 308 previously rejected organizations who were contacted, 89 organizations responded to the questionnaire.

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

## Key Recommendations

Rejected applicants suggested:

- More help sessions during the application process
- More courteous customer service
- Allow applications to be submitted in Arabic
- Streamlined requirements
- Advertise solicitation through: TV, print media, and online social networks
- Develop list of "serious" grantees, updated regularly, to forward information
- Gather NGOs by sector or geographical area when providing customized information sessions on how to apply/proposal writing, selection process, and/or reasons for rejection
- Separated USAID staff focused on NGO capacity building
- Funds dedicated to smaller grants
- Faster response, and lessons to be learned by rejected applicant included in the rejection

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

## Applicant Profile

The Questionnaire identified over 50% of respondents were Cairo based, and over 3/4 of respondents identified themselves as Development organizations, working mostly on areas of Democracy, Human Rights, and Child Protection. Only a little over a quarter of respondents had not applied to USAID before the 2009 APS. About 30% of respondents had received a USAID grant in the past. Of those, who had received a USAID grant, about 70% received one grant, while the remainder received two or more. Over 40% had received grants from other USAID partner organizations. Twenty-Eight percent have received at least one grant from another USG Agency, and only 40% had received a grant from other international donors. Organizations identified the USAID Website as the main source of information on the APS, followed by Other Egyptian NGOs and associates. Over half the of respondents said they were unaware of the USAID session on APS in August 2009, while the vast majority of those who attended the APS session found it useful.

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

How Can USAID increase understanding of future grant opportunities while impoving the grant application process?

The APS application information session that USAID/Egypt conducted appears to have been useful to those attending; however, several recipients suggested either more of these sessions, or breaking it down into smaller groups, so as to answer more questions. Several respondents were dissatisfied with the level of communication from USAID about the information session and about grant opportunities in general.

For example, respondents thought the APS and USAID's information session could be advertised through newspaper, TV, and magazines ads. Thirty-two percent of respondents wanted to see direct emails, suggesting an updated list of known or "serious" grantees who would forward information on to other NGOs. One suggestion was to build a list of contacts by approaching NGO associations, or asking each grantee/applicant to provide contact information for ten other NGOs in their area for outreach purposes. Facebook and more information via the web, in Arabic, were also encouraged.

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

## How Can USAID increase understanding of future grant opportunities while impoving the grant application process?

- Some respondents thought that USAID should move away from past recipients and focus on smaller NGOs. A few rejectees did not understand why an NGO is able to receive support from a USG Agency, but still be rejected by USAID for a direct grant. Finally there was mention of being informed of a rejection in a courteous, rather than a condescending, manner.

- A few respondents thought USAID should meet with NGOs ahead of time, to assess their capacity to receive a grant, one on one, or in some cases, with groups of NGOs from same governorates or sectors. The content of this communication desired by NGOs includes 'clearer' explanations of what USAID requirements were not met in a rejection; posting of summaries of how to meet APS requirements; process of grantee selection; and dates of information sessions. Some requested the opportunity to be trained on proposal writing in English.

- When asked about ways to improve the process for applying for USAID funding, allowing for Arabic applications came up frequently. Some suggested separate USAID staff focused on NGO capacity building, and separate funds dedicated to small grants geared toward building up the standard of NGOs. Another suggestion was for donors to focus their scopes on what NGOs are interested in doing, rather than specific objectives in a particular sector.

- In addition to wanting to see fewer or simpler requirements, many expressed their concerns as to the availability of USAID staff for support, pre-award, and felt having in-person meetings would facilitate the process on their side and allow them to better explain themselves and show off their true capacity.

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire
## Post Rejection Communication

- Among those dissatisfied with the information related to their rejection, some suspected a lack of transparency, while others simply pointed out that the language is standard and/or unclear, and un-tailored to the individual applicant. This raised suspicions among many that their applications were not closely reviewed; that there were simply too many applications and USAID cut some off arbitrarily; that awards are a politically motivated or based on connections with USAID staff; or that technical staff do not truly regard NGOs as partners.

- Rejectees showed some confusion as to their rejection, and sometimes demonstrated that they simply did not agree with the criteria or did not understand certain concepts in applying for a grant. In that category, examples included:
  - A lack of understanding of the need to match activities up with objectives
  - Not understanding the scope of activities under the APS
  - Felt that their past experience and/or their approval from other donors are ample reason to pass USAID's selection criteria
  - If allowed more space would be able to clearly lay out their planned project
  - Too small/inexperienced an NGO to be able to develop a cooperation protocol (APS requested that applicant demonstrate how it would coordinate with other NGOs/stakeholders).

- About 15% of respondents did not receive rejection letters, and others claim that USAID procurement office did not respond to their request for follow-up discussion after their rejection. Not all respondents were despondent about being rejected and some found the rejection letter useful in helping them modify their next application. Many had more cynical conclusions about the process, ranging from concluding that USAID is only interested in the same large NGOs that have worked with USAID in the past, to simply abandoning USAID for more reasonable European donors.

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

How does USAID requirements compare to other donor organization requirements?

- Among NGOs that worked with other donors, USAID was found:
  - To have comparatively more unclear requirements, with shorter deadlines and unclear objectives;
  - To be slower in sending rejection letters;
  - Not to give NGOs as much of a chance for discussion before applications are received.
- Some NGOs also noted that USAID is in its right to have as many requirements as any donor, but that the issue is that the NGOs need to better understand what these requirements are. Note that some NGOs appear to feel disrespected by USAID.

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

## What was your experience with USAID during the application process?

The majority of respondents agreed the most challenging issue for their organization is the requirement that papers be submitted in the English language. Many organizations feel they don't have the English language skills to be able to submit a well written concept paper or application. In addition to this the respondents felt the limitation on the number of pages they can submit made it difficult for them to fully express and to clarify their ideas. Many also commented that requirements were too complicated where that they did not understand the requirements and felt a lack of assistance from USAID staff to assist with questions.

The majority of respondents felt their experience with USAID was neither favorable nor unfavorable, and relayed similar sentiments in their comments. For example, many respondents concurred that there is no direct communication with USAID throughout the application process. The process requires organizations to submit applications via email which many respondents stated was not enough to establish a relationship with USAID or an understanding of RFP requirements. Many commented that having better communication with USAID staff may facilitate the process of writing sound proposals. Also, many respondents suggested that an office be created at USAID solely to support NGOs who wish to apply for a grant. Finally, the rejection process which simply involves a rejection letter offers no lessons learned to help organizations improve their future applications.
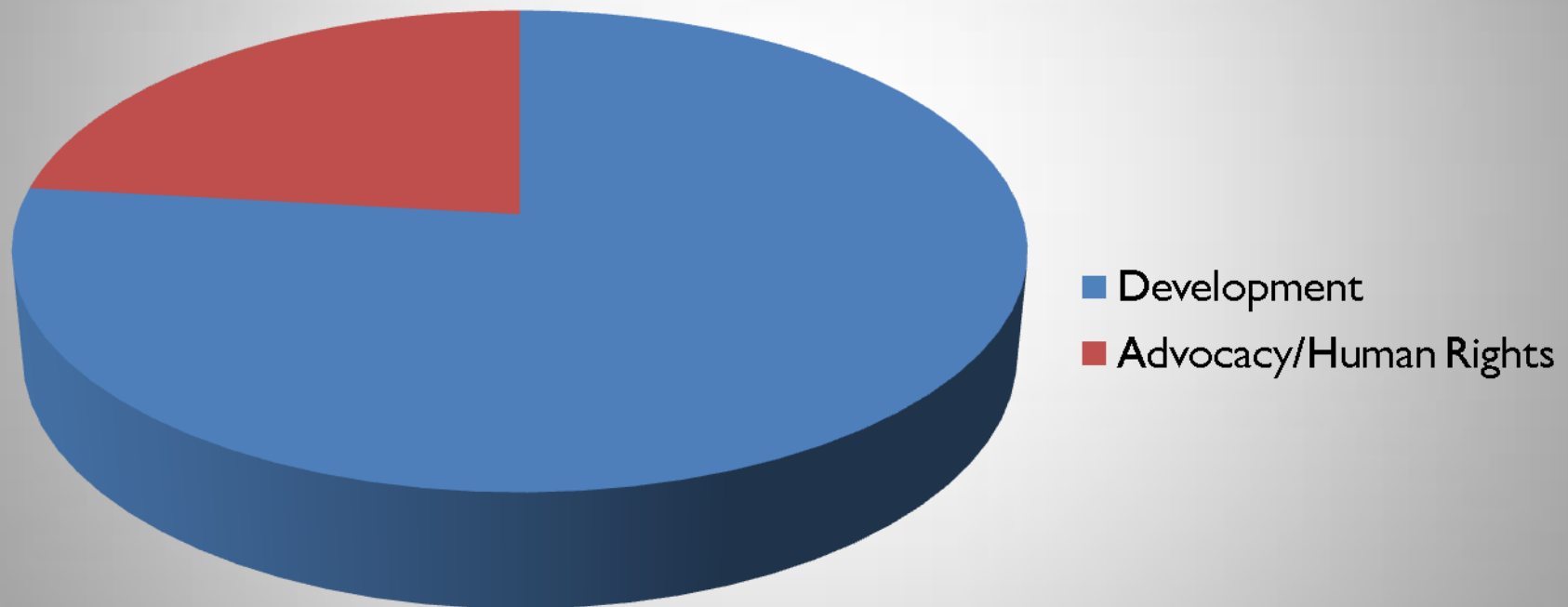
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire
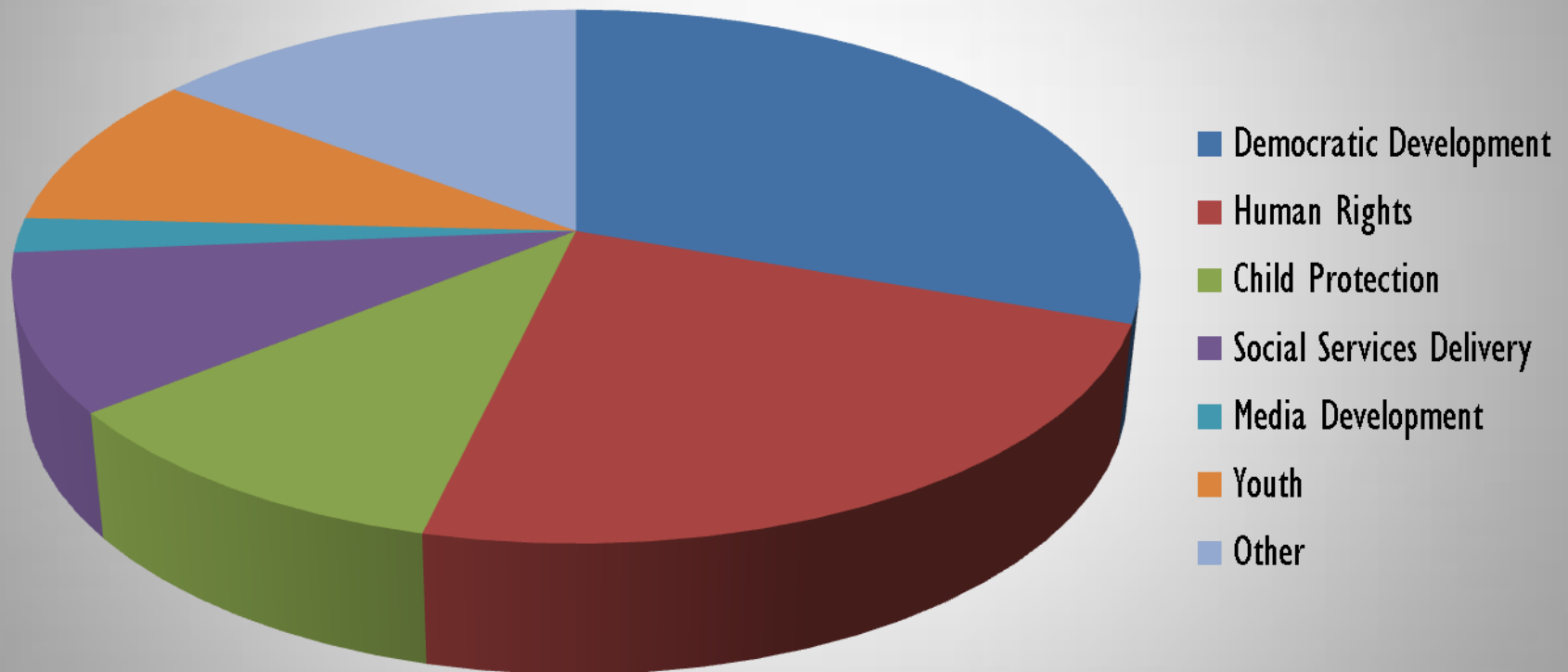
**Please identify where your organization is located.**



- Greater Cairo
- Upper Egypt
- Delta Region
- Sinai
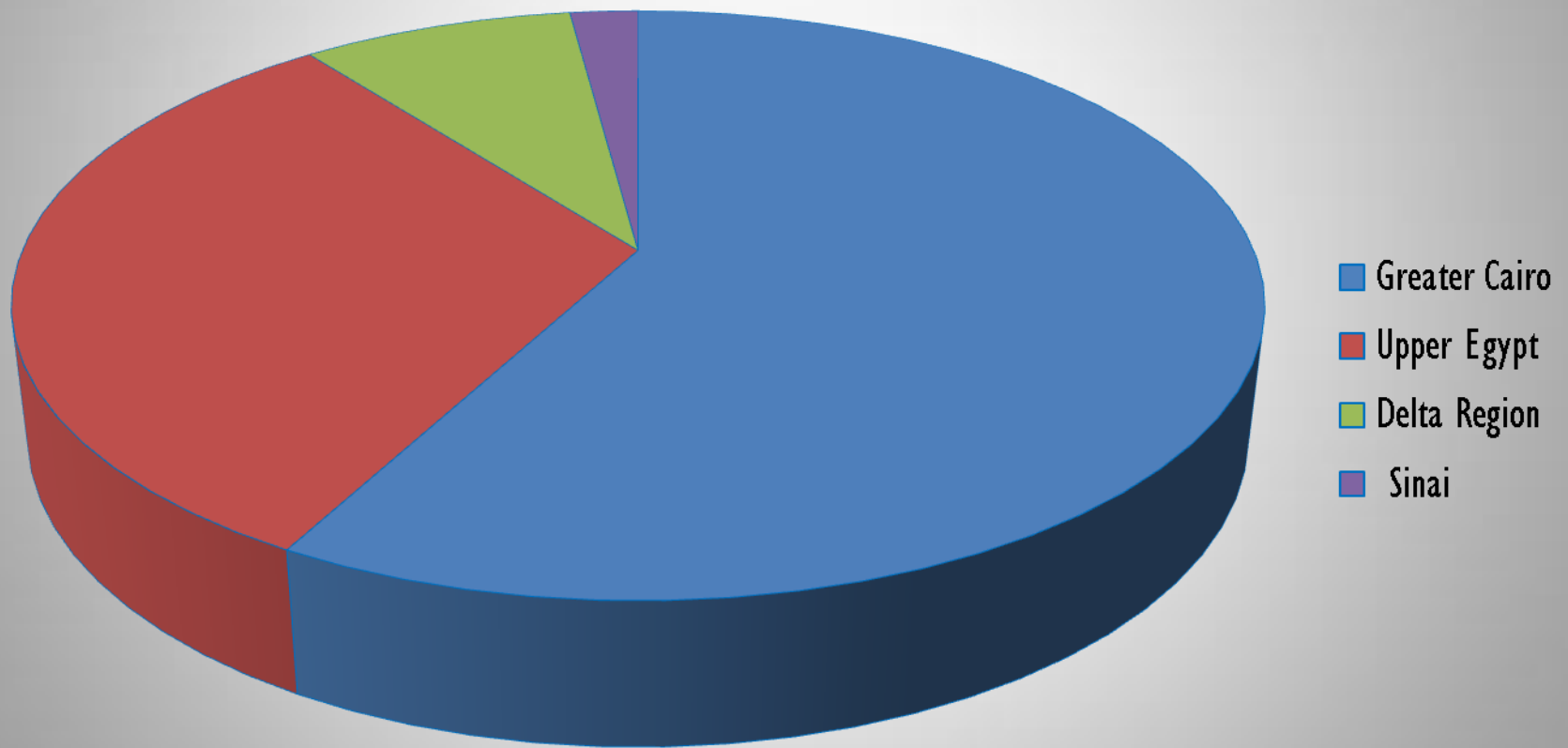
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**Please identify the type of your organization**



- Development
- Advocacy/Human Rights

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**Please identify the mission of your organization**



- Democratic Development
- Human Rights
- Child Protection
- Social Services Delivery
- Media Development
- Youth
- Other

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire



How many permanent employees does your organization have?

- 1 to 5
- 6 to 10
- > 10
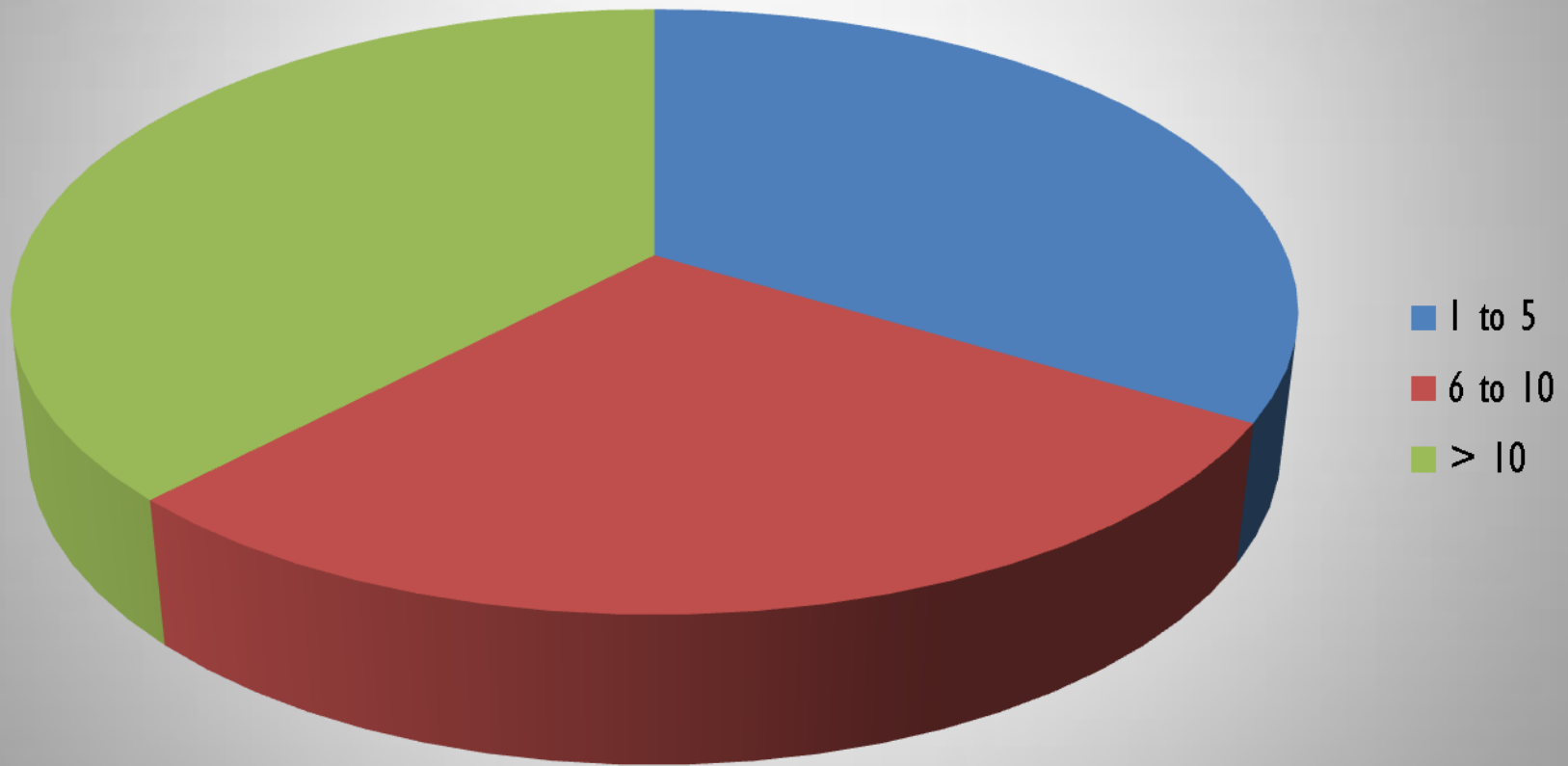
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**Prior to submitting an application under the USAID 2009 Civil Society Annual Program Statement, have you applied for USAID funding in the past?**



Legend:
- Yes (blue)
- No (red)
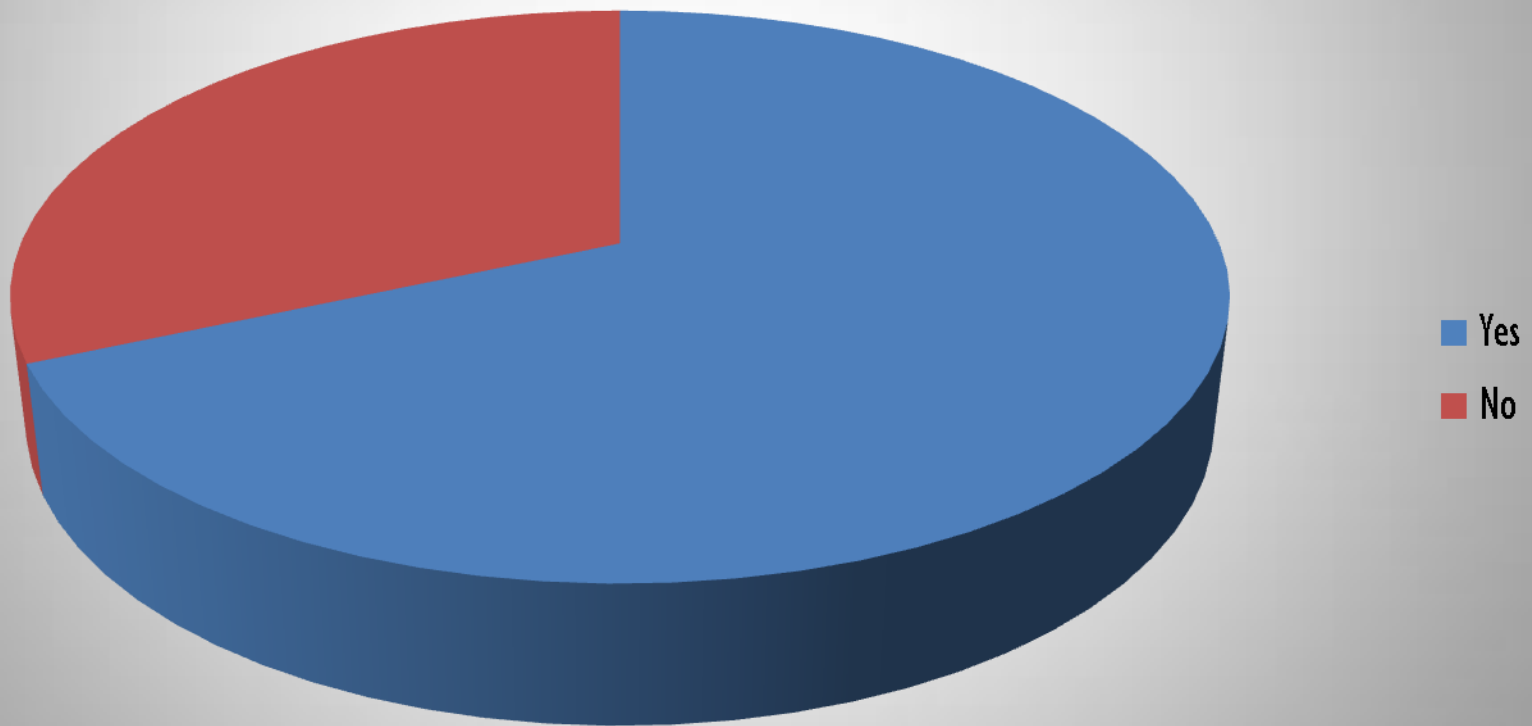
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

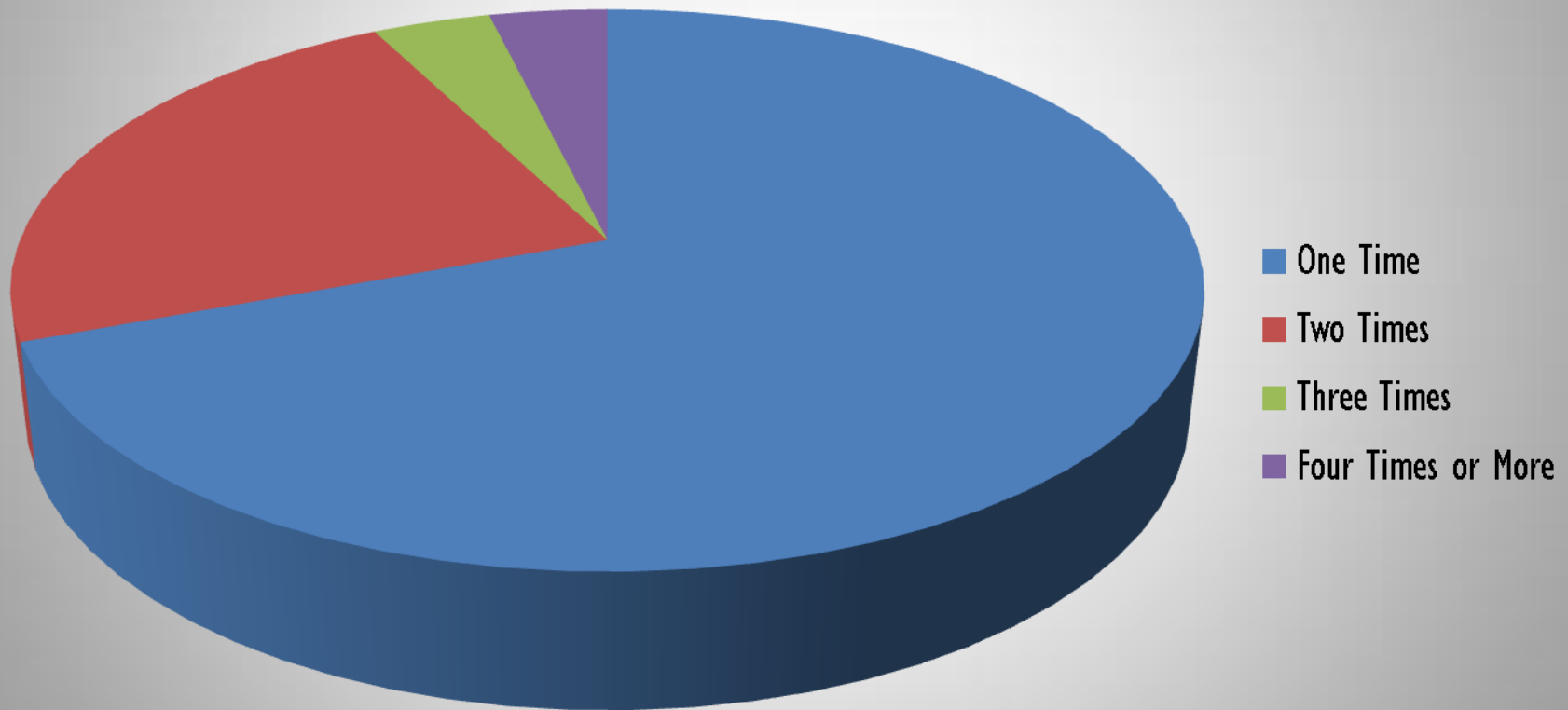**If Yes, please identify the number of times you previously applied**
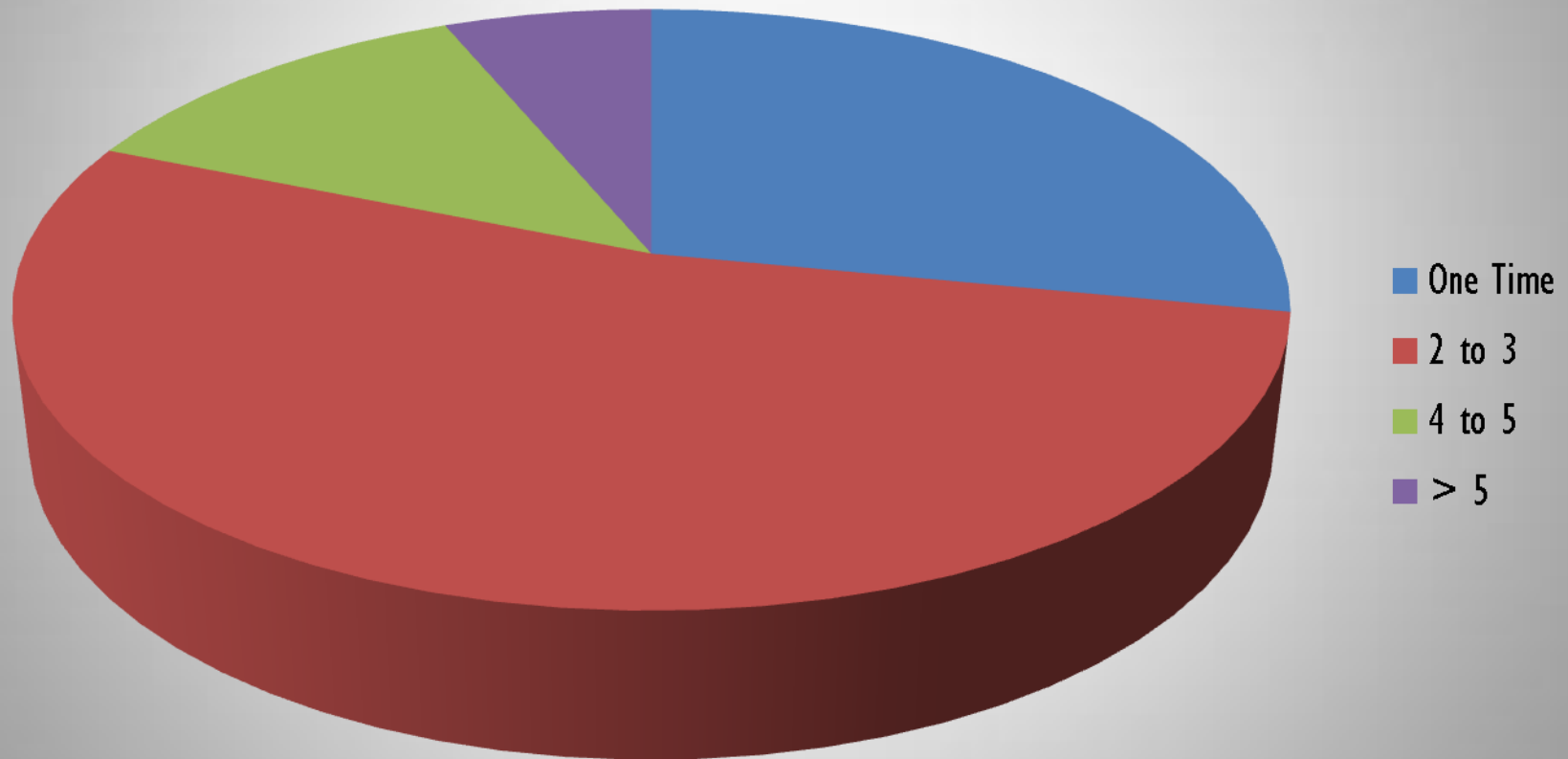


Legend:
- One Time
- 2 to 3
- 4 to 5
- > 5

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

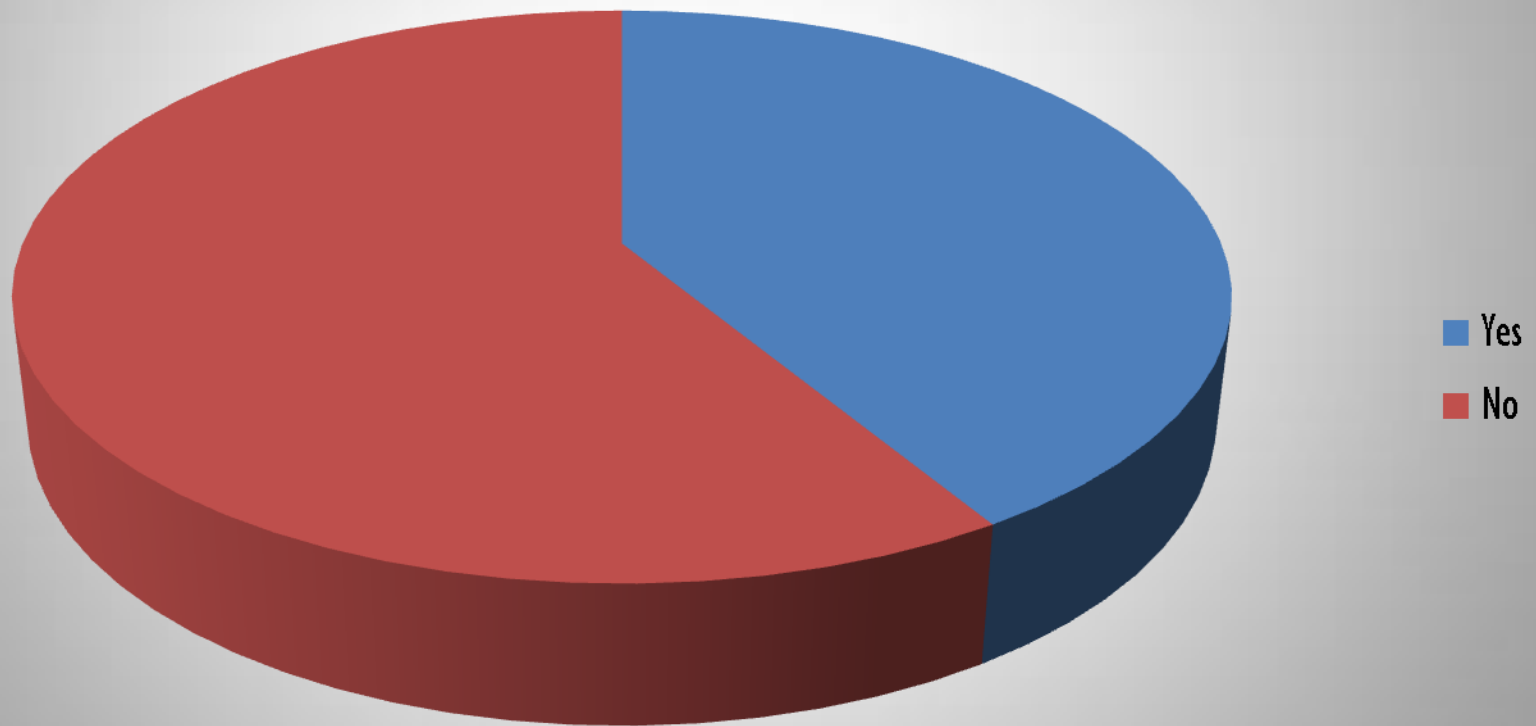**Does your organization currently have or have you in the past received a USAID grant?**



Legend:
- Yes
- No
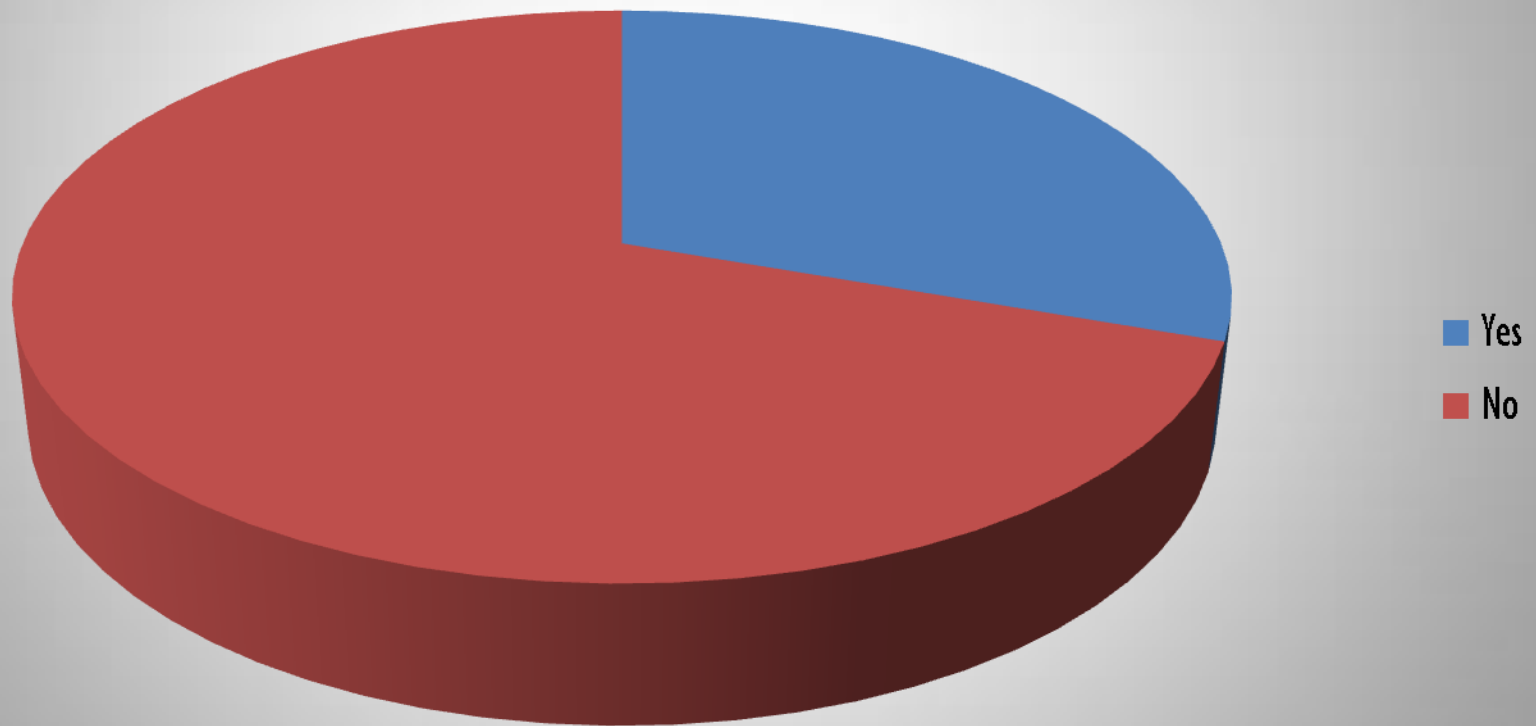
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire



If yes, how many grants have you received?

- One Time
- Two Times
- Three Times
- Four Times or More

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**Does your organization currently have or have you in the past received one or more grants from a USAID partner organization?**
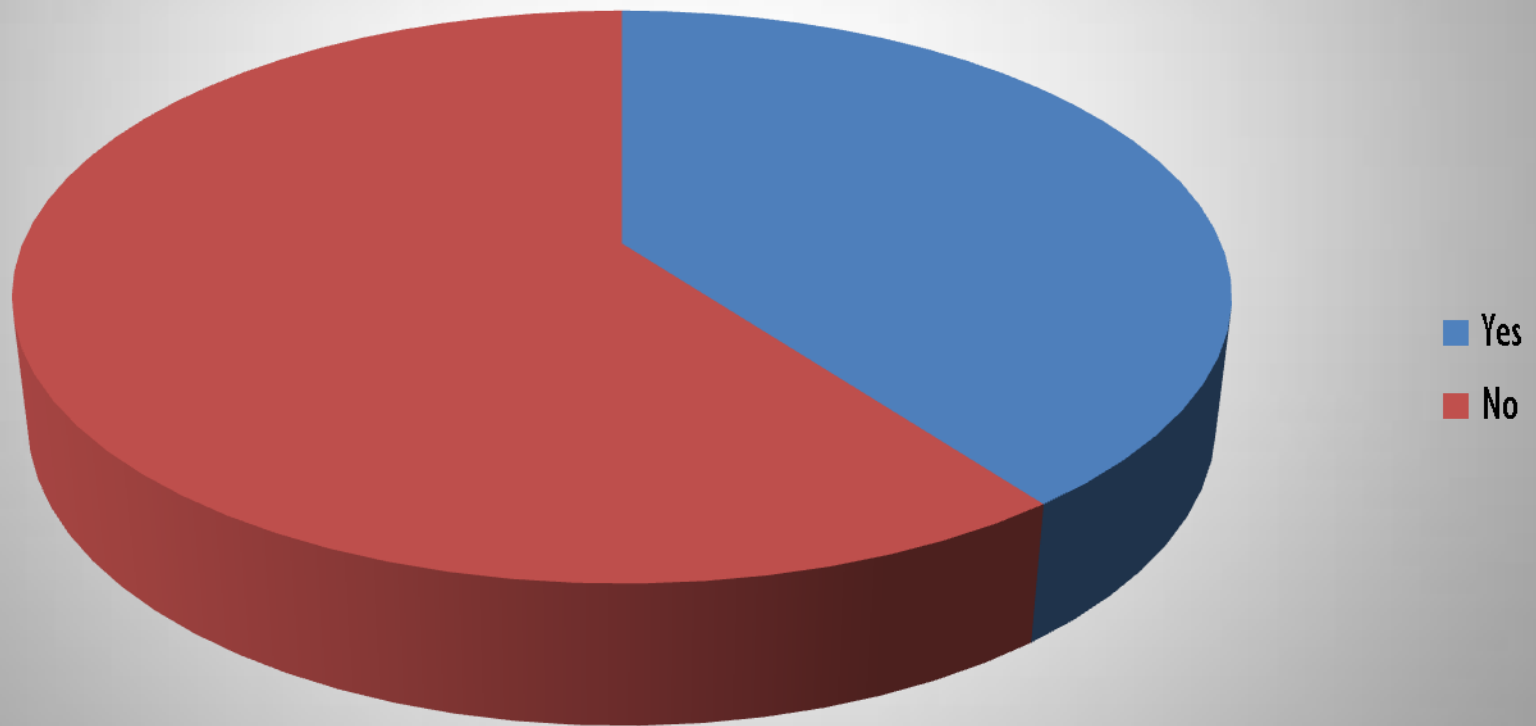


- Yes
- No

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**Do you currently have or have you in the past received a grant from another U.S. Government Agency?**
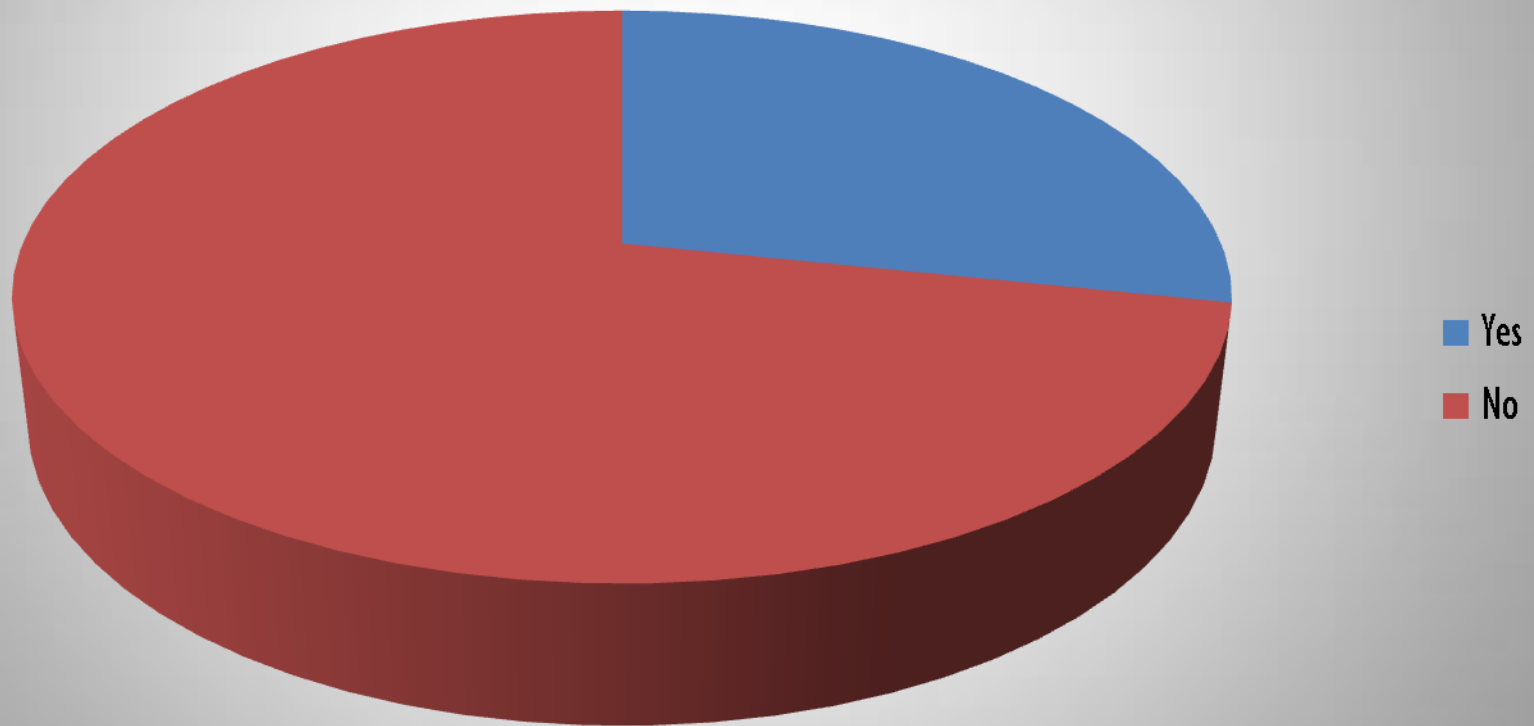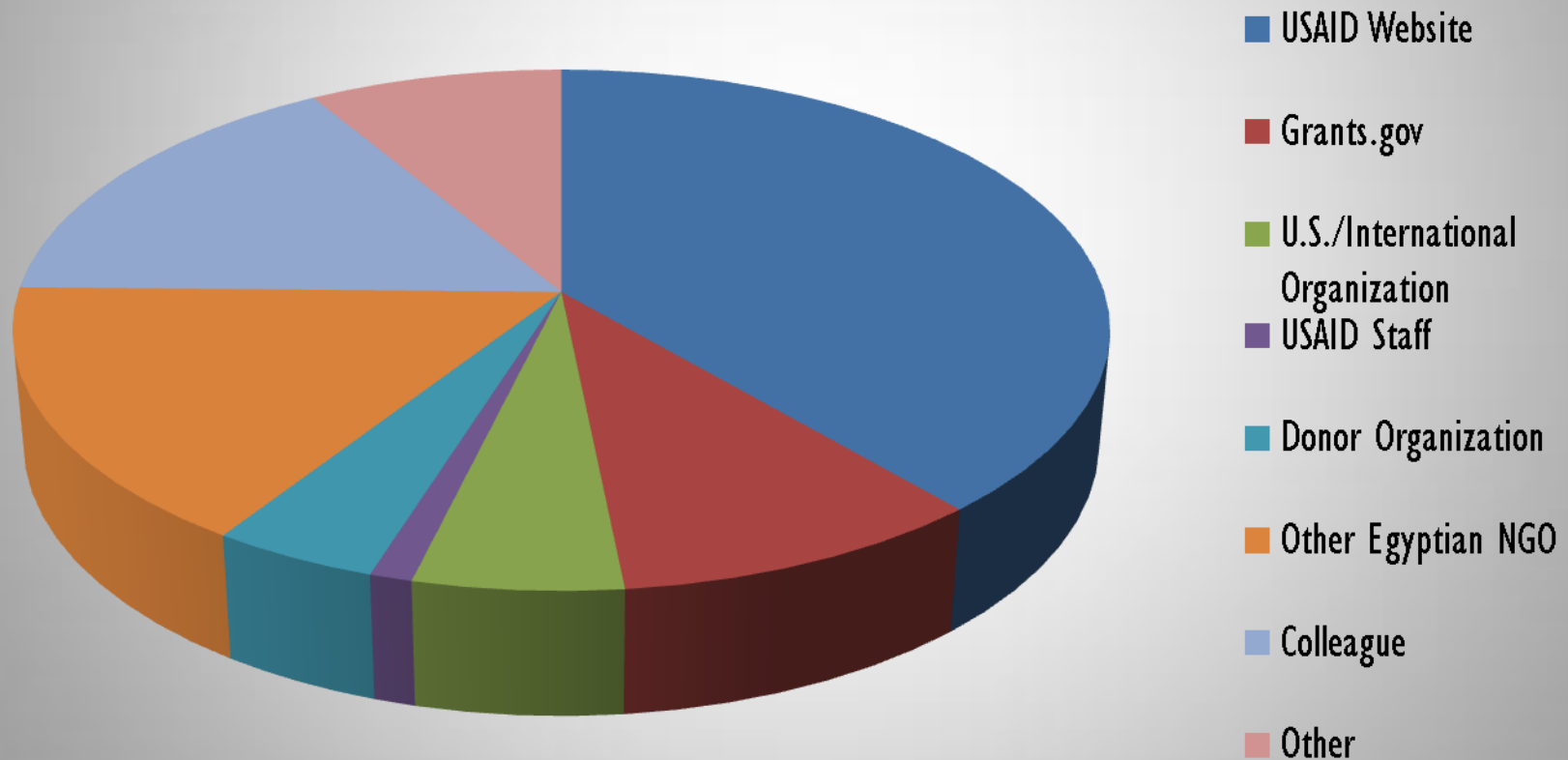


Yes
No

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**Do you currently have or have you in the past received a grant from other international donor organizations?**



Legend:
- Yes
- No

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire



How did you find out about the USAID Annual Program Statement?

Legend:
- USAID Website
- Grants.gov
- U.S./International Organization
- USAID Staff
- Donor Organization
- Other Egyptian NGO
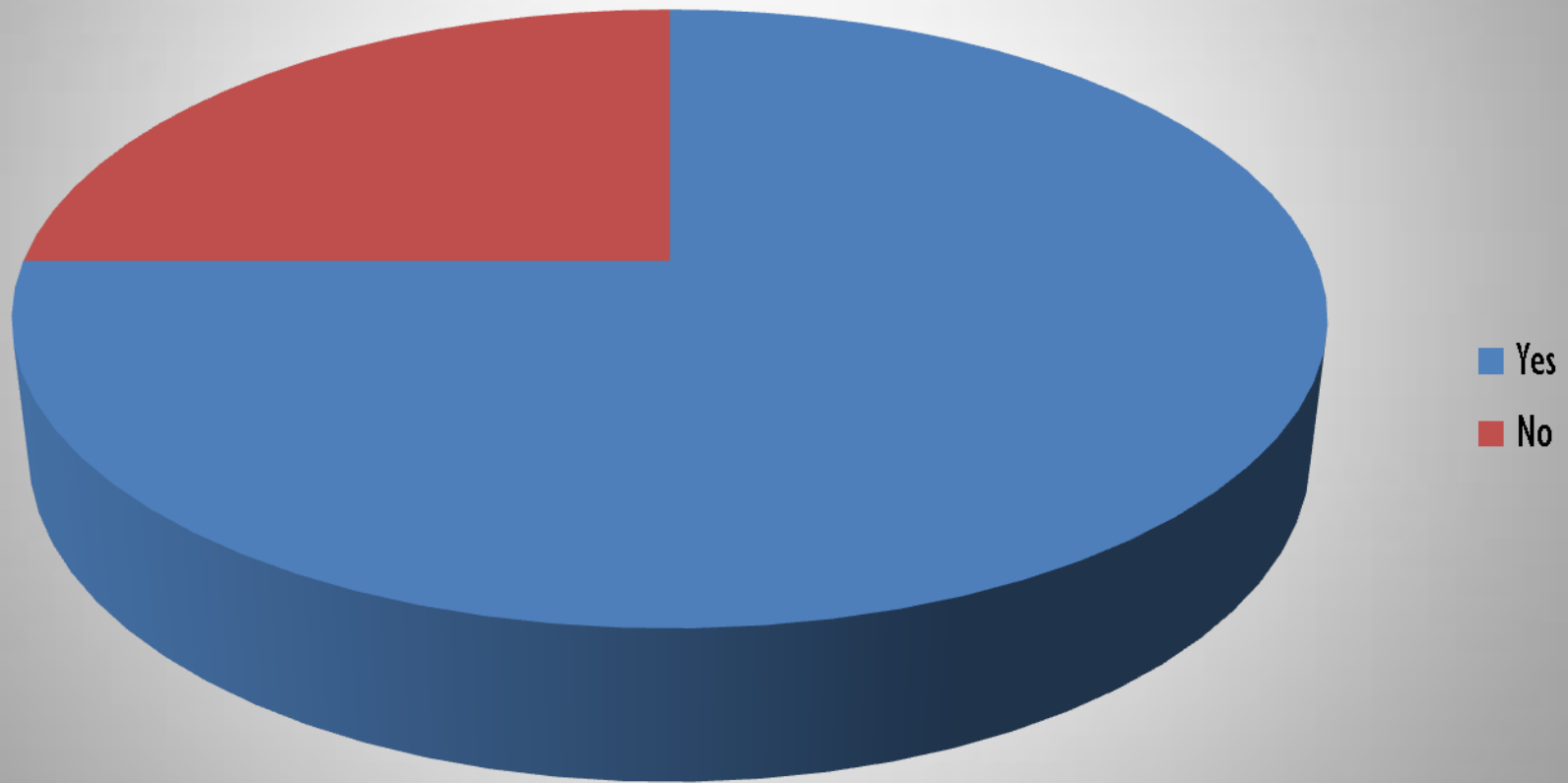- Colleague
- Other

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**USAID held an open information session on the Annual Program Statement in August 2009. Did you know about this session?**
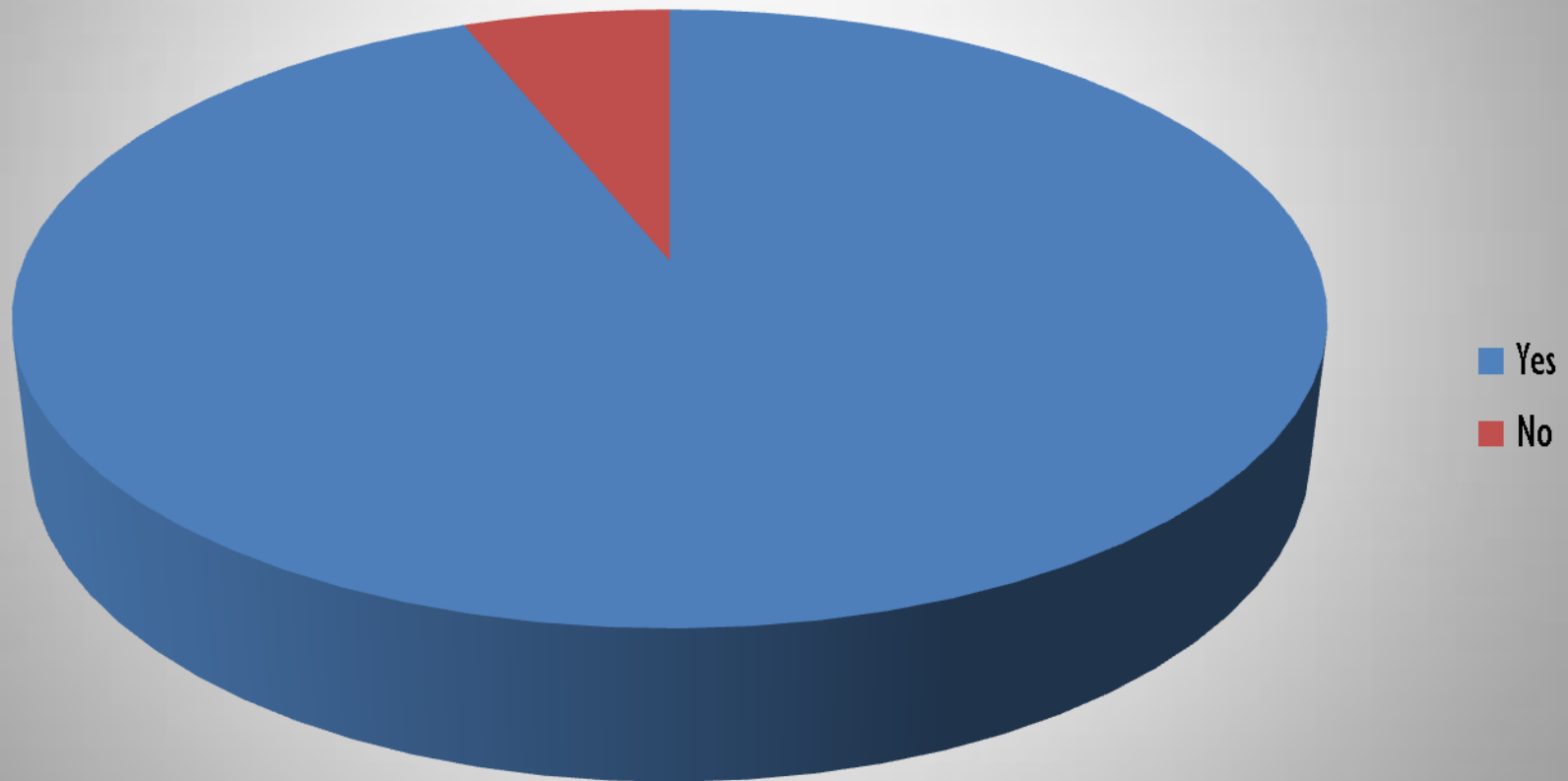


- Yes
- No
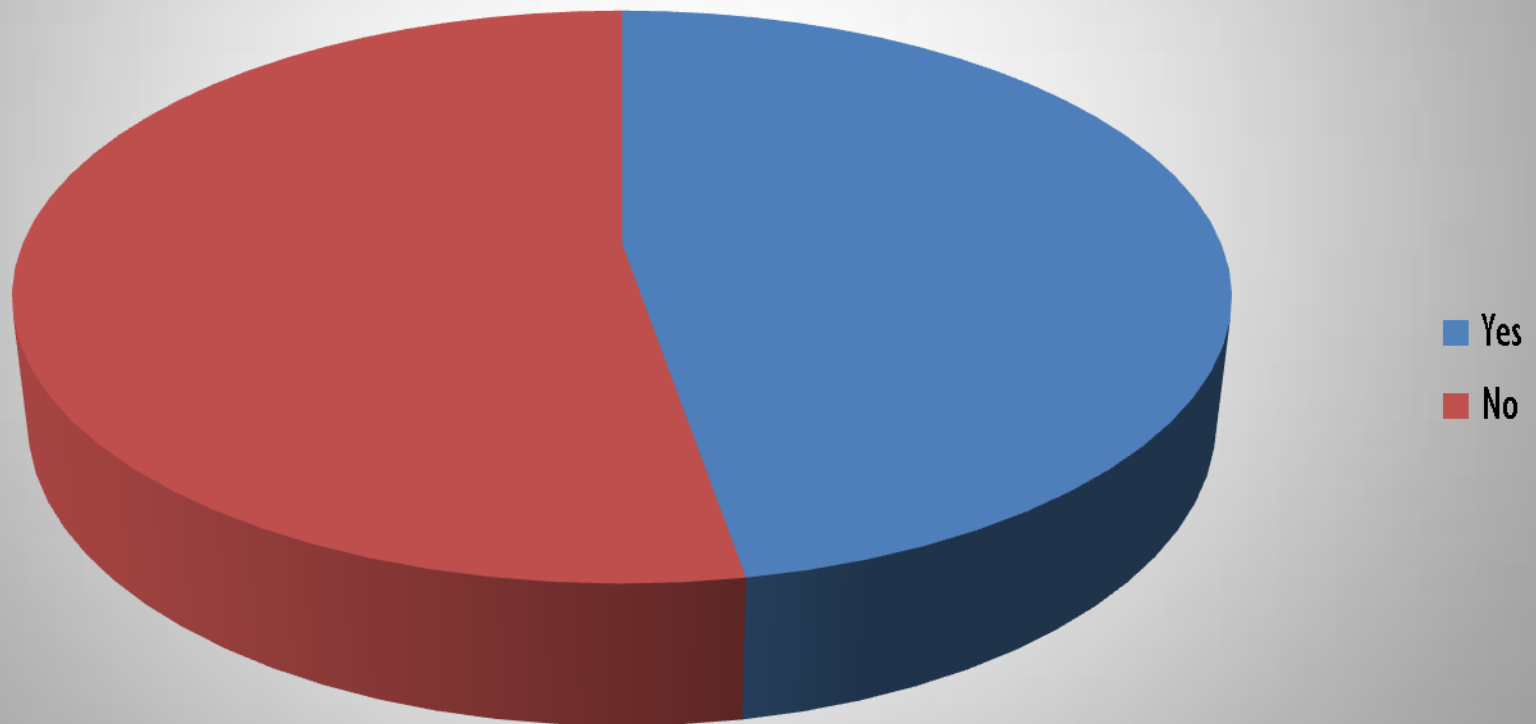
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**If yes, did you participate in this session?**



Legend:
- Yes (blue)
- No (red)

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**If you participated in this session, did you find it useful?**



- ■ Yes
- ■ No

# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

Each applicant for the Annual Program Statement received a letter summarizing the reasons why the concept paper or application did not meet the published evaluation criteria, to help the organization in their future development. Was this information help



Legend:
- Very Helpful
- Helpful
- Not Helpful
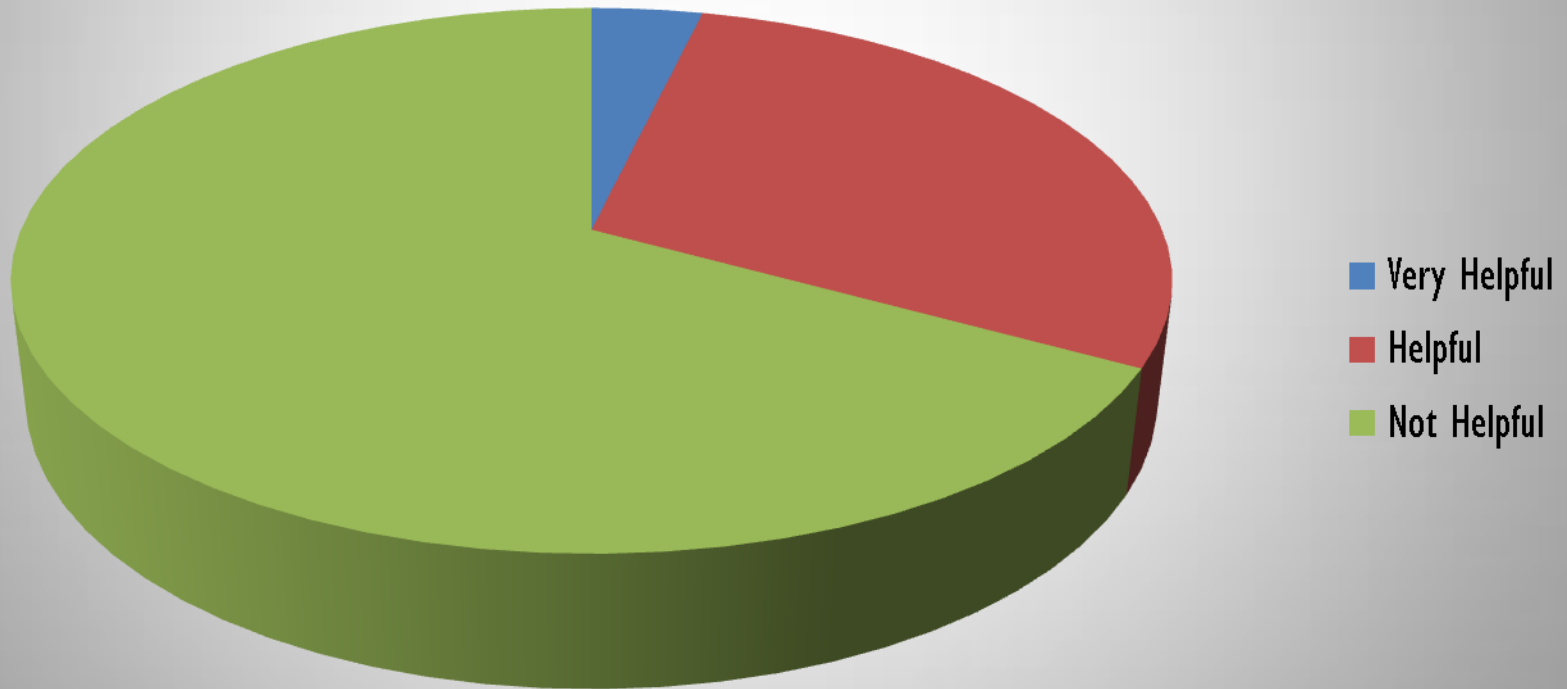
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire



If you have worked with other donor organizations before, please comment on how USAID's requirements compare to them?

- Much More Difficult
- More Difficult
- About the Same
- Easier
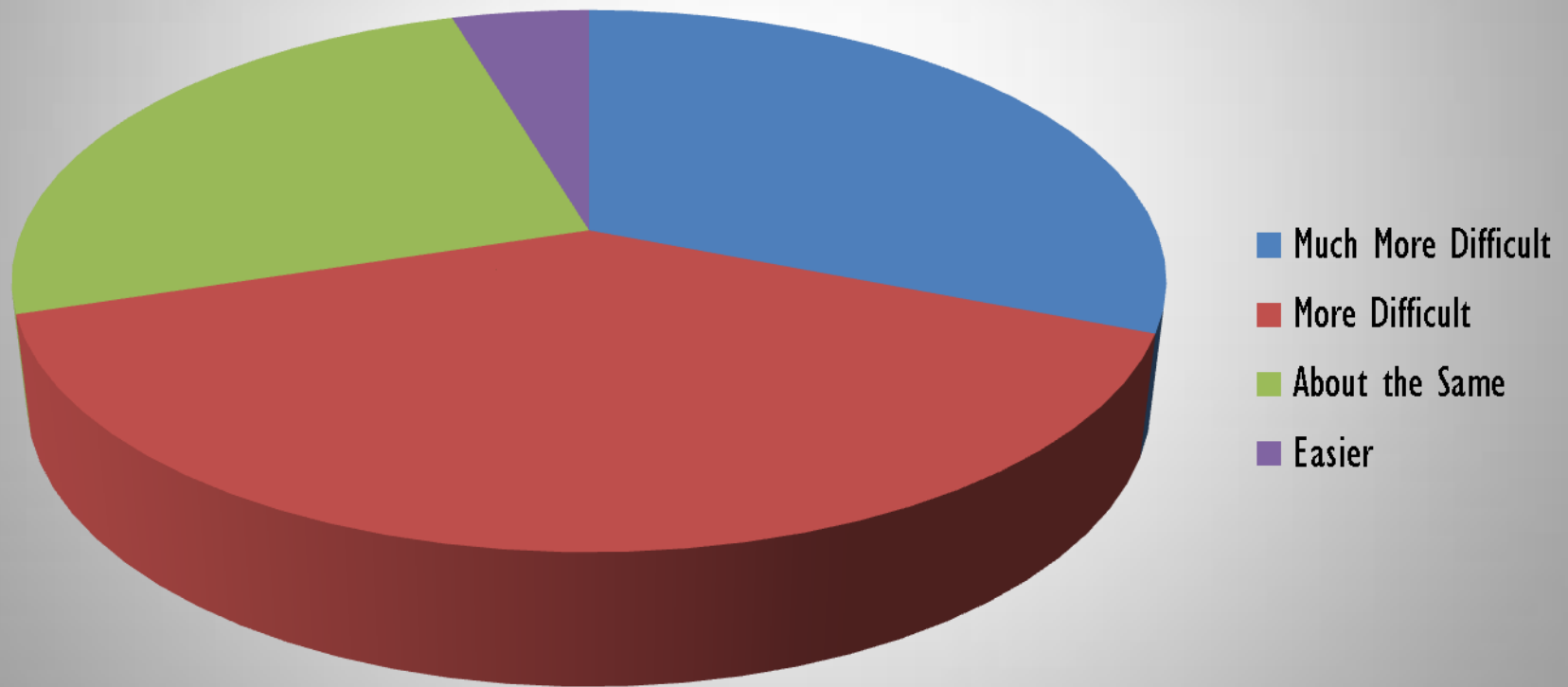
# USAID/Egypt Grant Application Questionnaire

**Generally speaking, how favorable was your experience with USAID during the application process?**



- Strongly Unfavorable
- Unfavorable
- Neigther Favorable/Unfavorable
- Favorable
- Strongly Favorable